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EDITORIAL **No ordinary program**

It's rare to find a new government initiative that's refreshing and uncomplicated. Many times the bureaucracy surrounding these well-intentioned programs has the intended beneficiaries scratching their heads wondering if it is actually worth all of the trouble.

A new state initiative called Iowa Great Places is seemingly different.

Great Places, announced by Gov. Tom Vilsack during his condition of the state address in January, and spearheaded by Anita Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, is designed to "make good places great" by bringing together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions or neighborhoods that cultivate the qualities that make a place special.

"We at the state have done a great job of telling you to work together, but at the giant enterprise we call state government, we're not very good at working together," said Ms. Walker during a public forum in Cedar Rapids on June 1.

Everyone can think of a great place they have visited, or about the kinds of additions or amenities that might make your community great. The Great Places initiative will focus financial and non-financial support from the state to help places like a neighborhood or community or region achieve its vision of greatness.

One not-so surprising revelation from the recent public forum was that for the first time 18 state agencies ranging from the Iowa Lottery to the Department of Corrections to the State Library of Iowa met to see how they could work together to help.

A couple other features of this initiative illustrate that it is not a normal government program.

- There's no application. All someone has to do to be considered is send a short "invitation" letter to the Great Places Citizens Advisory Board by July 1.
- State government will come to you. Two coaches will be assigned to each place to help identify strengths, gaps, potential resources and next steps. This includes an on-site visit.
- This is no "peanut butter approach," as Ms. Walker described the usual state approach with new initiatives of spreading a little across the state to make sure everyone gets some. Only three pilot sites will be selected in this first year. That is bound to rile some political feathers, but it also means that state resources can be focused on just those places instead of being spread too thin across the state.

It's too early to tell how things will materialize, but we like Ms. Walker's unconventional approach and enthusiasm with this initiative. If you have a vision for making your place great, it's not too late for you invite the state government to work with you to make it happen. For more information on this unique initiative visit www.iowagreatplaces.gov.